

Abridged Report of the Imperial Society for the Education and Relief of the Blind.

Patroness: Her Imperial Majesty Marie Alexandrovna.

In the autumn of 1881, through the kindly care and charity of a private individual, the first well organised Russian School for the Blind was opened at St. Petersburg, and the services of a lady, who had been specially trained in the Dresden Institute for the Blind at the expense of the same philanthropist, were secured as directress. The number of pupils was at first four, and soon afterwards rose to ten. Such was the humble and modest origin of a movement that has already its offshoots in many of the larger towns of Russia, and has led to the establishment of a number of schools that may, for completeness of detail and perfection of administration, with the best Institutes in Western Europe. The curatorship of these schools is now under the special patronage of Her Imperial Majesty the Empress. Within the last ten years fourteen schools have been opened, in which above four hundred blind pupils are being educated, besides two Homes for the grown-up blind, two Asylums for the aged blind, and one Infirmary for diseases of the eye. To several of these establishments are attached foundation scholarships, whilst they are all furnished with libraries of books printed for the blind, and official statistics have been drawn up of the extent to which blindness actually prevails in Russia: Moreover, a small School for the Blind has been developed into a model Institute

where a hundred pupils are lodged and taught in a building, named the Alexander-Marie School and constructed on the latest and most approved plan.

The Gouvernement first directed its attention to the helpless condition of our blind in the beginning of the present century, when the celebrated Frenchman, Valentin Haüy, was invited over to this country by Alexander the First, and authorised to open a school for the blind at St. Petersburg. But he was met with so many obstacles and delays that he was before long compelled to abandon all hopes of carrying out the Emperor's wishes, and, when he returned to France in 1817, there was but one blind pupil in the school he had opened. This school still exists, and is now under the care of the Imperial Philanthropical Society and numbers at the present date from twenty to thirty boy-scholars. Previously to the foundation in 1881 of the Imperial Society for the Education and Relief of the Blind, under the immediate patronage of Her Majesty the Empress, there existed in Russia the following institutes for the aid and support of the blind: 1) a small school at St. Petersburg for twenty blind girls, 2) a branch division for forty blind boys and girls, attached to the Warsaw School for Deaf and Dumb, 3) a private school near Riga for twenty five blind children, and 4) two small infirmaries in Moscow for grown up blind persons. We must not forget to mention that in 1880 a Tradesmen's Home for forty blind men and women was opened at St. Petersburg, and two years later a Society for the Care and Training of the Blind was established at Moscow, with the direct sanction and under the patronage of Her Majesty the Empress.

In 1877, the Chief Committee for the relief of the families of soldiers who had been killed or disabled in the Turkish War found that, besides the wounded, a large number of young soldiers, otherwise perfectly healthy, had during the campaign become either totally or partially blind. It was thought well first of all to give help to those who had

not yet become completely blind, and these were accordingly placed under the special care of experienced oculists. At the same time, two Homes were established, one at St. Petersburg and the other at Kieff, for the training and education of soldiers who had lost their sight in suitable trades; and the Empress, when presented with the first basket woven by the young blind soldiers, was so pleased with the neatness and accuracy of their work, that she ordered the palace kitchens to be henceforth exclusively supplied with baskets by these Homes. But up to this time it was only the army that had profited by the aid and services of the Committee, and, when it had so far completed its labours and was about to be dissolved, suggestions were made that it should be reorganised on a larger scale so as to administer to the wants and necessities of the blind without distinction of class or profession: and in 1881 the statutes of the Imperial Society for the Education and Relief of the Blind, as now constituted, received the imperial sanction. Although the capital at the disposal of the Society amounted in January 1892 to nearly 2,000,000 roubles, its work has not seldom been hampered by want of means; but by carrying out a happy idea originally suggested by its first President, K. Grot, it has been effectually placed on a much surer and firmer basis. At his proposal, the Synod was petitioned to authorise a collection to be made on the fifth Sunday after Easter in each year in every church throughout the empire on behalf of the funds of the Society; and during its ten years existence no less than 1,265,375 roubles have thus been collected.

It is only right that we should dwell on one gratifying point, namely, that in no country is the care of the blind carried out on so wide and comprehensive a scale as in Russia.

In all foreign countries the training and education of the blind is entrusted to the state, or to local and provincial authorities, and private societies for the help of the blind are established to supply only that aid which the go-

vernement does not undertake to afford. Thus, there are abroad different societies for finding places and work for those of the blind who have been brought up to any particular trade, for establishing workshops for the blind, for publishing cheap books and manuals for their use, for the prevention and diminution of blindness, or for some special object calculated to better the position of the blind. But the activity of any one of these societies is never extended to the whole kingdom, but is limited to a definite locality, and not seldom to one particular educational establishment. An exception to this general rule is to be found at Paris in the Association Valentin Haüy, whose operations extend over the whole of France; but even in this case the Association takes upon itself to help the blind only in those points not included in the Gouvernement programme, and it is to the Gouvernement that the training and education of the blind are entrusted. Such a division of labour is unknown in Russia, and though, of course, the Imperial Society for the Education and Relief of the Blind is not the only society founded for the succour of the blind, it is none the less based on a far wider scheme than any other, and takes upon itself, not only the establishment of institutes for the blind in all parts of the empire, but the supervision, regulation, and execution of all that concerns the spiritual and temporal wants and requirements of the blind. Not one of our institutes for the blind is supported solely at the expense of the state, county-councils, or town-corporations.

It may, however, be doubted whether, in consideration of the yearly increasing sphere of its activity, it may not before long be advisable to adopt some plan similar to that obtaining in France, by soliciting the Gouvernement to take upon itself the educational part of the Society's work on behalf of the blind. The mere enumeration of the multiplied labours imposed on the Society will, we think, be sufficient to show the wisdom and necessity of such a reform. As

at present constituted, the Society undertakes 1) to build schools for blind children: 2) to establish trade-asylums for blind adults: 3) to print books in embossed type: 4) to publish a journal specially devoted to questions concerning the blind, besides pamphlets, manuals, and instructions as to the treatment and instructions of the blind: 5) to adopt measures calculated to prevent blindness: 6) to found refuges for the aged and decrepit blind: and 7) to collect statistical data as to the extent of blindness in Russia.

We shall now proceed briefly to set forth under each of these separate headings the work that has been accomplished by the Society during the ten years of its existence.

I. Schools for Blind Children.

α. The Alexander-Marie School for the Blind.

The school, already referred to in the opening paragraph of our Report, was in 1881 placed under the care of the Society. A second school, on a like small scale, was opened for blind girls, and in 1885 the two schools were united, for which purpose commodious premises, capable of accommodating 55 pupils, were hired. The number of pupils before long became sufficiently large to necessitate the appointment of an experienced and trained Director, and for this purpose Mr. Nedler, Inspector of the Marie Girls' Institute, was chosen, after he had gone through a special course of study under Mr. Buttner, Director of the Royal Institute for the Blind at Dresden. In 1889 the school was removed to a building constructed after the plan and designs of Mr. Tomiescko, to whom our heartfelt thanks are due for the conscientious and admirable manner in which he has carried out the wishes of the Society. The central building, which is light and airy and composed of three stories, is devoted to

the school and class-rooms, with lodgings for those engaged in the working of the school: whilst two side-buildings are given up to bath-rooms, a spacious laundry, and the steam machines for pumping up water to the central reservoir. A small wooden building is attached for the use of the workmen and servants. At the back of the school there is a large and magnificent garden, for the finished state of which the Society is mainly indebted to the kind labours of the late M. Hartmann, Director of the Alexander Lyceum.

All the expenses incurred in building the school were met by the Society: the only private contributions being the donation of 1000 roubles by Mr. Ratkoff-Roshnoff, and the furniture, vessels, and vestments for the school-chapel, a gift from M-me Yurevitch.

But if the school did not have the benefit of numerous private subscriptions, it had the good fortune at the time it was being built to receive a munificent and touching proof of the deep interest taken in the Society's work by the Imperial family.

The late Emperor, Alexander the Second, after the death of Her Majesty, Marie Alexandrovna, was graciously pleased to assign a memorial gift of 1,000,000 roubles to the formation of a fund whereby the future of the Society might be perpetually ensured. A year later, in 1888, Her Majesty, Marie Fedorovna, consented to become the supreme Patroness of the school, which now assumed the name under which it is still known.

The Alexander-Marie School is designed for 120 pupils, 70 boys and 50 girls. On the first of January, 1892, the pupils numbered in all 100 children, 58 boys and 42 girls. It is divided into two Sides, the Preparatory School, consisting of two Classes, and the three School Classes, after having passed through which a pupil is moved up into the Trade Division, one department of which is devoted to instruction in wicker-work of every kind, the other department

being set apart for instruction in brush manufactures. In the education given at this school, which is of a strictly elementary character, great attention is paid to gymnastics and to singing, particularly church-singing: lessons in music being also given to those among the pupils who display any decided musical talent.

At the end of the first term, in 1890, four blind boys, aged from 19 to 20, were put out to the brush-trade, in which three of them had acquired considerable skill and knowledge. At the end of the following year, 1891, two blind sisters, having satisfactorily passed the final examination, were also placed out in the brush-trade.

It is a rule with the Society to supply the pupils, when they leave the school, with clothes and underlinen, and also, when necessary, to grant a monthly sum of money, so that they may be able to find for themselves a suitable and respectable lodging.

Besides the six pupils, of whom we have already spoken, mention should be made of the blind son of a village priest, who was obliged, through illness, to leave school and to be sent home. On his recovery, he was again admitted into the school, and, having exhibited capacity and liking for copying books printed in embossed type, was engaged by the Society to transcribe books for the use of the school and its library, in which kind of work he is still employed and generally earns from twenty to twenty five roubles a month.

During this period of ten years, only four pupils have been expelled: one for bad conduct, and the other three for abnormal weakness of intellect, which rendered it quite impossible for them to pursue their studies with any advantage to themselves.

3) Provincial Schools for the Blind.

The Society is always ready to establish schools for the blind in towns where among its inhabitants are to be found

persons who sympathise with its work on behalf of the blind, and who can guarantee a sum of money sufficient to cover at least a part of the expenses incurred in keeping up the proposed school.

All that concerns the opening, maintenance, and organisation of the school is entrusted to the care of a local Committee, who are empowered to choose from among its members a President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Cashier.

The number of scholars admitted to each of these schools is at first limited to ten; and it is required that the children entering should be from 7 to 11 years of age, healthy in body, and mentally capable of passing the course of studies as laid down in the general programme for all schools in connection with the Society. During the first few years the instruction of the children is superintended by a school mistress, who at the same time supervises all the domestic arrangements of the establishment. Before entering on her duties, unless previously qualified for the post, she is required to go through a course of training in one of the Society's schools, such course generally extending over a period of from twelve to eighteen months.

Since its establishment ten years ago, the Society has opened in different provincial towns twelve schools; namely, at Kieff, Reval, Kostroma, Kazan, Voronege, Charkoff, Odessa, Moscow, Perm, Smolensk, Samara, and Toula. The actual number of pupils in each school is shown in the adjoined table brought up to the first of January, 1892, on which date there were in the school at, —

Name of town.	Founded in the year.	In all.	Boys.	Girls.
Kieff.	1884.	40.	30.	10.
Reval.	1884.	13.	6.	7.
Kazan.	1885.	24.	11.	13.
Kostroma.	1885.	37.	13.	24.
Voronege.	1887.	31.	20.	11.

Name of town.	Founded in the year.	In all.	Boys.	Girls.
Charkoff.	1887.	30.	30.	—
Odessa.	1887.	14.	14.	—
Moscow.	1890.	9.	9.	—
Perm.	1890.	12.	12.	—
Smolensk.	1891.	9.	9.	—

Besides the above ten schools the Society has within the present year a school in Samara for blind boys and one at Toula for blind girls. In both cities the Society has been greatly aided by acts of private munificence; Mr. Kourline, a resident merchant of Samara having placed at its disposal a two storied house capable of accommodating thirty pupils, and Mr. Sokoloff, of Toula, having contributed to its funds a donation of 2500 roubles.

Active steps are being taken to open schools at Oupha, Astrachan, Chernigoff, Elabonga, Tver, and Tiflis.

γ) Auxiliary Fund for the Provincial Schools.

The establishment of schools wherein the blind can receive good instruction and be fitted to earn their future livelihood is by no means the heaviest or most important task undertaken by the Society for the Education and Relief of the Blind. Its chief and most difficult work really begins when its blind scholars, having finished their course of studies in one or another of its schools, go into the world and enter on practical life. The experience of many years both abroad and in Russia has taught us that those only of the blind are able with any profit or advantage to pursue the trade in which they have been trained, who enter the world under favourable conditions; that is, who can find immediate support and help either from their relations or from the establishment in which they have been brought up. Together with the perpetual increase in the number of our blind

scholars, there has necessarily been a like continually increasing call on the resources of the Society, which can only be met by the establishment of a fund for the aid of our blind artisans and workpeople. For this purpose, special auxiliary funds have been established in connection with the Alexander-Marie and five provincial schools; whilst a sum of 20,000 roubles has been allotted from the capital of the Society to the school at Kieff, and a sum of 5000 roubles to each of the schools at Kostroma, Kazan, Voronege, and Reval.

It is however, evident that these small sums can serve but for the first few years, and that an appeal must be made to private charity, if the Society is to be provided with means adequate to meet the yearly demands that will be made on its funds and resources.

II. Trade Homes.

At different times four Trade Homes for blind adults have been opened by the Society at St. Petersburg, Kieff, Onpha, and Kamenetz-Podolsk. Three of these Homes have since been closed, inasmuch as experience has taught that, though the education of blind adults, up to thirty five years of age, presents no great difficulty, it is all but impossible to maintain among them the necessary order and discipline. Far more profitable results are to be obtained from the labour bestowed on the care and education of blind children, and for this reason the Society has deemed it well to employ the means originally provided for blind adults in increasing the number of its schools and homes for blind children.

The blind adults in the Home at St. Petersburg have accordingly been transferred to a private Home founded in memory of Dr. Blessig, and the Society has assigned to it fifteen scholarships, each of the value of 300 roubles.

At the actual moment there is only one Trade Home, namely that at Kamenetz-Podolsk, under the direct supervision of the Society. This Home was opened in 1884, and its tenants, numbering ten, are instructed in wicker and brush manufactures under the superintendence of a blind tutor, who was formerly one of the pupils in the Trade Home at St. Petersburg. The expenses of the Home amount yearly to 2765 roubles, and it has a reserve-capital of 25,865 roubles.

III. Bookprinting in Embossed Type.

It was not till 1881 that any book designed for the use of the blind was printed in Russia, and till 1885 such books were printed in the ordinary so-called uncial type. The Gospel according to St. Matthew, and The Child's World, by Ouschensky, were published in this way. And, though Louis Braille's dot system was already in 1881 in use at the St. Petersburg School for Blind Boys, only a very few short tales and The Gospel according to St. Luke were printed in this type in the Russian language; all such works having to be published at Berlin in consequence of there not being at St. Petersburg a single typographical press for printing in the Braille type. The first book printed in Russia after the Braille method was A Collection of Stories for the Young, published at Moscow by M-me Adler, who not only ordered the necessary type from Germany but herself set up the type for the book. About the same time a press for printing with pin-heads after the Braille system was invented by Mr. Treumann, Inspector of the St. Petersburg School for the Blind, and a few books were published according to this new method. But, in spite of the praiseworthy efforts of these and a few other private individuals, the number of books for the use of the blind continued for a long time to be extremely limi-

ted. At last, in 1886, the Imperial Paper Department, and subsequently a private printing firm, undertook to bring out books in Braille characters; but the expenses were too great to permit the Society to publish more than a few books that were absolutely required for educational purposes. And during these last ten years not more than twenty six books, in all 12,450 copies, have been published in the Braille type at an expense of 22,000 roubles.

The Society has followed the example of Paris and other Western European cities and introduced into Russia the plan of transcribing or reproducing by handbooks for the blind. Both at St. Petersburg and in several provincial towns lady-circles have been formed for carrying out this most useful work. The St. Petersburg circle at present numbers more than sixty members, and, thanks to their labours, the library attached to the Alexander-Marie School has been considerably enlarged and already includes the best works of our Russian classics, as well as a number of books for children. This one circle has up to the present date transcribed no less than 650 volumes in the Russian language.

IV. Publications Relating to the Blind.

From the very first the Society has done its best to propagate useful information concerning the treatment of the blind by distributing gratuitously, besides its annual reports, a number of pamphlets on the education of blind children and the means to be adopted for bettering in general the position of the blind. It has further published translations of the more important papers issued by the chief societies abroad, in order to make the Russian public acquainted with what is being done in foreign countries on the behalf of blind children and adults. And lastly, in 1886, it began the publication of *The Russian Blind*, a monthly journal

specially devoted to the consideration of all questions concerning the blind. At the same time it has issued a Russian translation, to the number of 40,000 copies, of *A Manual for the Home Treatment and Preparation for School Instruction of Blind Children*, by M. de la Sizeran, Inspector of the French Society for Relief of the Blind.

In view of the ignorance prevailing throughout our country on this important question, it is necessary that the Society should enter on a still more active propagandism, and take every possible measure to make the public well acquainted with the results obtained by the different societies already at work in Russia and abroad.

V. Preventive Measures against Blindness.

One of the chief aims of the Society has been to encourage and promote among our people the use of preventive measures against blindness. Statistics have most clearly proved that two-thirds of the cases of blindness could have been prevented by timely recourse to a preventive treatment, and that they are nothing else than the consequence of ignorant negligence. Thus, one of the most ordinary causes of blindness is suppurative inflammation of the eyes, from which new-born children are liable to suffer, but which can be effectually removed by bathing the eyes with cold water immediately after the child's birth, and the injection, by means of a syringe, of one drop 2^o/₁₀₀ of dissolved nitrate of silver. From the year 1885 the Society provides gratis for the use of the blind two beds in the Eye Infirmary attached to the University of Charkoff, one bed in the Eye Infirmary at Novotcherkask, three beds in the Eye Infirmary at St. Petersburg, and two beds at the Eye Hospital in Moscow. In 1891, the Society established at its own cost the first Russian Eye Ambulance at Taschkent, and steps

are being taken to open a second at Tiflis. Poor persons suffering from eye disease, and living in places where there is no resident oculist, are, on application to the Society, furnished with journey-money to the nearest Eye Infirmary, all their expenses during the time of their treatment being also paid from the funds of the Society.

VI. Help for the Aged and Decrepit Blind.

Whilst the principal aim of the Society is to promote the education and training of blind children, it further undertakes, as far as possible, the care and help of those poor blind, who from old age, illness, or other cause, are unable to work for a livelihood. With this end in view, the Society has placed in different charitable institutions many sickly or aged blind persons, and within the last few months has put up in the St. Petersburg City Almshouses fifteen beds, which are specially reserved for the aged blind. Sums of money are also from time to time given to the necessitous blind, both in St. Petersburg and in the Provinces: and during the past ten years the Society has distributed in this way 27,000 roubles.

VII. Statistical Data.

At the Society's initiative, for the first time in Russia, a census was taken in 1881 by order of the Minister for Home Affairs of the blind in this country. From the returns made it appears that the total number of blind persons then living in Russia amounted to 189,909, namely, 94,097 males and 95,830 females. The fifty provinces, or governments, of European Russia contributed the larger number of blind, namely 173,782; whilst in the Kingdom of Poland there

are but 5,373, and in the districts of the Caucasus 10,774. Blindness was found to be most prevalent in the north-eastern districts of European Russia, no less than 50 out of every 10,000 inhabitants being thus afflicted. Children of a tender age constitute about ten per cent of the whole number.

In bringing this abridged report to a close, the Imperia Society for the Education and Relief of the Blind gladly avails itself of the opportunity to express its warmest thanks to all who, during the last ten years, have, in one way or another, exhibited sympathy and interest in its work. None the less, we are convinced that we might obtain still more satisfactory results, and might come more effectually to the aid and help of the poor and suffering blind, if we could only count on the cooperation of a larger number of members and help-workers. But, unfortunately, there are many people who do not even yet know of the existence of our Society: whilst others, though aware that there is a Society for the relief of the blind, do not give themselves the trouble to learn where and how they can inscribe their names on the list of its members. No formality of any kind is required to become a member. All who are willing to take part in the Society's work are urgently requested to make their desire known by enclosing ten roubles, the amount of an annual subscription, in a letter addressed to the Chancellery of the Society. Great Stable Street, House 1, Lodging 4, St. Petersburg. An acknowledgment of its receipt will in all cases be duly forwarded to the new member by return of post.

Дозволено цензурою. Спб. 5 Февраля 1893 года.

Типографія Р. Голике, Троицкая 18.